

OFFICE & APPEARED
ON PAGE A-31

NEW YORK TIMES

6 June 1986

ESSAY | William Safire

Rogues Rewarded

WASHINGTON
Rafi Eitan is a hero, almost a legend, in Israel. He was the agent who tracked Adolf Eichmann to his South American hideout, and led the team that seized the war criminal and brought him to Israel for trial. When American lawmen met a different Israeli official with the first name of Rafi and asked if he were Eitan, the man replied modestly, "I should be so lucky."

Aviem Sella may also be a hero. This Israeli Air Force general is believed by American authorities to have led the surgical strike on the Baghdad nuclear reactor. I cannot verify that belief, but if true, General Sella would be directly responsible for saving millions of lives: had the Iraqis been able to build a nuclear bomb, Teheran would be leveled and its inhabitants incinerated.

For the last couple of years, however, these two authentic heroes appear to have been engaged in an activity that is bringing shame and dishonor on their country: hiring a couple of Americans to steal secrets from the nation Israel must depend upon for its survival.

Jonathan Jay Pollard, an American civilian working for the U.S. Navy on anti-terrorism, is no hero: he and his wife confessed to espionage and implicated their Israeli contacts and controllers. The Pollards in America, and their spymasters in Israel, have done more damage to their respective countries than any terrorist could dream of doing.

In Washington, Israel's detractors are almost beside themselves with glee as the case unfolds and duplicity is exposed. Israel's friends — especially Jewish Americans, who have been doubly betrayed by an Israeli operation paying a Jew to be a traitor — are not merely dismayed, but justifiably furious. And the grand jury that indicted the Pollards remains in business; we'll see more.

The questions left hanging are these: Who in Israel knew of this operation? Who should have known? And after its cover was blown and the American spies were arrested, what did the Government of Israel do to bring to justice all those who broke the United States law and

acted against the best interests of Israel?

The line put out was that this was a "rogue operation," run by that resourceful fellow Rafi Eitan, a lone wolf with ties to the right-wingers. If true, rogues are well financed: the Pollards were paid \$2,500 a month and flown to Europe and Israel for meetings. Then-Colonel Sella provided a sapphire and diamond ring, valued by the F.B.I. at over \$6,000, for Mr. Pollard to give to his wife. The spies were promised a payoff amounting to over \$300,000 over 10 years. Some slush fund; does nobody in Jerusalem keep track?

Moreover, Israelis with diplomatic immunity in Washington were used as contacts. The "rogue operation" was able to employ the services of a scientific attaché and a female secretary, who photocopied the reams of documents produced by the Pollards. Colonel Sella, then studying for a doctorate in computer science at N.Y.U., was the control, reporting to Mr. Eitan, murkily associated with the Prime Minister's office. The group produced stacks of material; did nobody in Mr. Peres's Government ask how all this stuff was obtained?

If the Pollards' confession is true, four Israelis are guilty of violating U.S. Criminal Code sections 641 (theft) and 794 (espionage). They should be prosecuted, here or there; if guilty of breaking our laws, they belong in jail. The same goes for any Americans who hire Israelis to steal their Government's secrets. We're allies; our democratic values are the same and our national interests are generally parallel; some mindless spooks lose sight of the huge difference that makes.

Instead, Mr. Eitan was given a plush job in industry; the air force officer, after the Pollards were caught, was promoted to general, given command of the American-built Ramona base in the Negev, and is on the fast track to chief of staff. This will hardly deter future rogue spying.

Mr. Peres, on whose watch this breach of faith took place, talks of "cooperation" with U.S. investigators, which consists mainly of passively verifying facts unearthed by

the Americans. He fails to see the damaging consequences of maintaining a pretense of deniability.

What should Israelis do? First, get mad: what kind of control does the Government have over its spies? Is there anybody in Jerusalem who asked "Is it worth it? If we get caught, will this cost Israel far more than we can ever hope to get from the U.S.?" More profoundly, is there nobody in power who will say, when brought the fruits of such a poisonous tree, "Is this right?" □